Report to the Legislature

Foster Parent Retention and Stability of Foster Placements

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 202(6)

July 2002

FOSTER PARENT RETENTION
AND STABILITY OF FOSTER PLACEMENTS

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 202(6)

INTRODUCTION

This report is provided in accordance with the 2001 budget proviso requiring the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to report quarterly to the Legislature "progress against appropriate baseline measures for foster parent retention and stability of foster placements." This report constitutes the reports due April 1, 2002, and July 1, 2002.

The *Building a Future for Washington's Children: Foster Care Improvement Plan*, is a major component of the *Kids Come First Action Agenda.* This collaborative effort between the Children's Administration (CA) and Casey Family Programs was published in May 2001 and was designed to develop long-term solutions to the challenges facing the foster care system. Key foster care and child welfare workers from throughout Washington State spent many hours working to create this framework to improve the retention of foster parents.

The retention of skilled and experienced foster parents is crucial in meeting the needs of vulnerable children placed in the child welfare system. When sufficient homes are available, children can be placed with families who are better equipped to provide for their unique needs. This, in turn, is likely to improve the stability of their placements during the time the children must remain in foster care away from their own families. These key outcomes of increased stability for children and increased retention of foster parents continue to be important strategic foci of the Children's Administration.

The information presented in this report begins with baseline data as of July 1, 2001, and presents quarterly data from July 1, 2001, through April 1, 2002.


RETENTION OF FOSTER HOMES

The Children's Administration (CA) has been measuring foster home retention based on the net increase or decrease in the total number of licensed foster homes. CA recognizes that both the retention of currently licensed homes and the recruitment and licensure of new homes impact the total number of licensed foster homes; therefore, the current measure is, at best, a proxy of retention. CA has been exploring alternative data measures that would provide a more accurate view of retention efforts and hopes to transition to another measure in the future. As CA works toward a new measure, CA has combined the reports from the last two quarters with earlier data to provide as complete a picture as possible.

Number of Licensed Foster Homes

RETENTION	July 1, 2001 Homes (Run 7/01)	July 1, 2001 Homes (Run 12/01)	October 1, 2001 Homes	January 1, 2002 Homes	April 1, 2002 Homes	Percent Change in Available Homes (7/01-4/02)
Statewide baseline	6,396	6,209	6,177	6,184	6,229	0.3
Region 1	859	844	833	835	845	0.1
Region 2	777	741	763	755	780	5.2
Region 3	902	887	879	880	905	2.0
Region 4	1,260	1,190	1,194	1,185	1,188	(2.0)
Region 5	1,224	1,190	1,176	1,189	1,191	0.1
Region 6	1,374	1,357	1,332	1,340	1,320	(2.8)

It is a priority of the Children's Administration to increase the number of foster homes available to care for children and to improve the accuracy of foster home records. In August and September 2001, CA's Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) engaged in a data clean up effort to better identify available homes through more accurate recording in the automated Case and Management Information System (CAMIS). This cleanup resulted in the closure of 187 homes in the automated system (see comparison of before and after data for July in chart above), but resulted in no change in the actual number of available homes. There has been a slight increase since then in the total number of available homes statewide, as indicated by the comparison of the *July 1, 2001 Homes (Run 12/01)* and the *April 1, 2002 Homes*.

State and Regional Trends, Total Homes
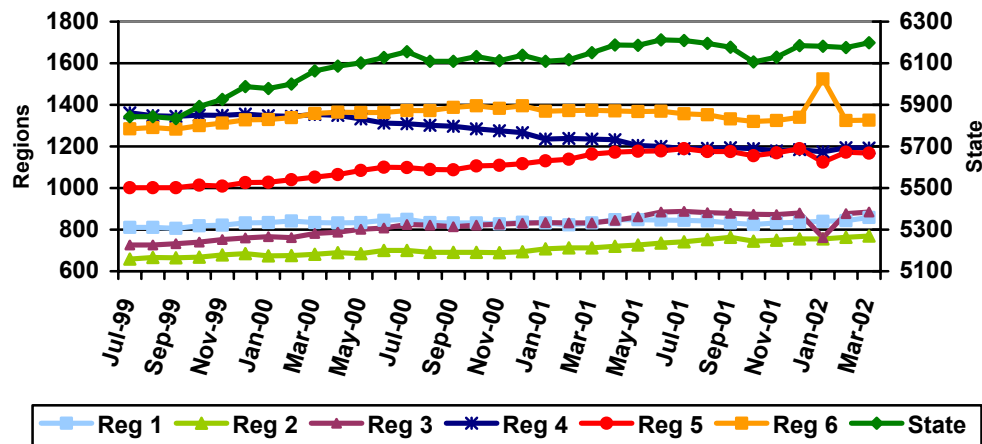
As indicated in the graph above, the number of licensed foster homes changes from quarter to quarter, more dramatically in some regions. The reasons for this are not entirely clear and may be related to workload and other related issues. It is more important to look at the total number of homes over time, which shows a general upward trend in most regions and the state.

STABILITY OF PLACEMENTS

The number of children in stable placements also shows a general upward trend in most regions and the state as indicated in the chart below. CA measures stability of placements using the federal measure of, "the percent (of children) with no more than two placements during the first 12 months in care."

**Percent of Children with No More Than Two
Placements During First Twelve Months in Care**

Stability of Placements	July 1, 2001	Sept. 1, 2001	Jan. 1, 2002	April 1, 2002	% change
Statewide baseline	81.1 %	81.1%	81.6%	82.4%	1.3
Region 1	86.9 %	87.1%	87.3%	90.3%	3.4
Region 2	79.4 %	77.8%	76.3%	76.7%	(2.7)
Region 3	76.9 %	76.9%	76.9%	75.8%	(1.1)
Region 4	78.6 %	80.7%	79.7%	78.9%	0.3
Region 5	81.8 %	82.9%	83.0%	84.3%	2.5
Region 6	82.4 %	84.5%	84.7%	86.4%	4.0

WORK IN PROGRESS

The work of identifying and making long-term system changes to improve the retention and recruitment of new foster homes continued through this reporting period. More than 60 people attended an April 30, 2002, Recruiters' Summit and two follow-up meetings to design an improved system to recruit more parents to the task of taking care of children in foster and kinship care.

One outcome of those meetings was the decision to develop a Needs Assessment and Recruitment Plan for each region. Regional recruiters will work from a written plan based on the goal to recruit foster homes that can meet the specific needs for the kinds of children who need out of home care in each part of the region.

This formalized planning and recruiting process should improve outcomes for both recruitment and stability. If CA recruits families that are willing and equipped to take children with a certain kind of problem, the families are more likely to remain as foster parents. Children also should move less frequently if they are living with foster parents who have been recruited specifically to meet their needs. This new planning process is designed to go into effect this summer as an amendment to the existing statewide recruitment contract.

A more coordinated and targeted recruiting system should also lead to an increase in the total number of homes so more people will be doing the work. This should

also help improve the retention rate because more people will be taking care of the children placed in foster care, easing the load on current foster parents.

Work continues toward a plan to better coordinate both recruitment and retention/support efforts.

Discussion by the Executive Committee of the *Foster Care Improvement Plan* will determine exactly how the system will look. Possible models of a public/private partnership are currently being evaluated. Members of a separate committee of the *Foster Care Improvement Plan* have reviewed the present system and are working to identify a new model of support for foster parents.

The regional team leaders for the *Foster Care Improvement Plan* have come together around changing the agency culture to improve the relationships between foster parents and other caregivers and the agency. One concrete step, based on a successful model in Vancouver, is to have all regional coordinators set up forums with foster parents, social workers, and private agencies throughout their regions. The forums will focus on exchanging information and ideas. The forum in Vancouver was so successful that the Vancouver office plans to convene forums three times a year.

Additional work around culture change is being done through training at the CA Training Academy for new social workers. A much greater emphasis will be placed on training social workers to interact more positively with foster parents and other caregivers. The work of accreditation also continues in this area.

A strong component envisioned in the new recruitment model would include a strong communications and public relations arm. That will help get more information to foster parents and other caregivers. This effort should give the foster parents a greater sense that they are being included as changes to the system are being discussed and put into place.

The work on getting relatives more involved in the care of children also is moving ahead quickly, with a work group underway that is to report to the legislature in November. A public awareness group of the *Foster Care Improvement Plan* will help in that effort.

The Children's Administration also is working on a new respite policy intended to make provision and payment of respite more consistent across the state.

In short, CA is aggressively moving on a number of fronts to make the long-term system fixes. Major system change is not easy, but the administration is strongly focused on the goal of increasing the number of quality homes providing foster care, through retention and recruitment. This, in turn, should result in an increase in the number of children in stable placements.